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CANDLES IN THE SUN

By WILLIAM GRIFFITH

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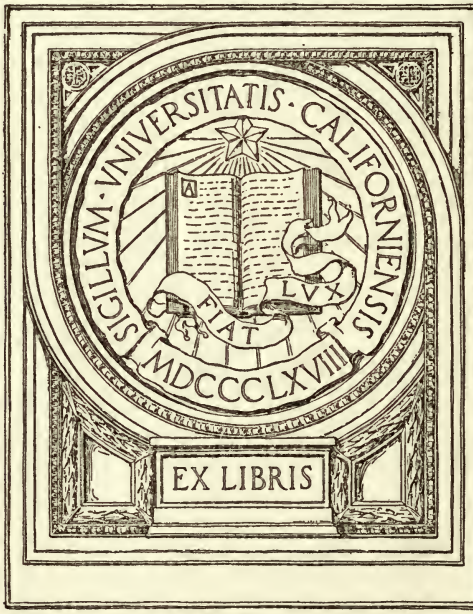

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Univ. of California

Candles in the Sun

by

William Griffith

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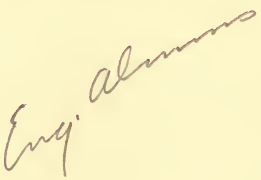

THE TORCH PRESS
CEDAR RAPIDS
IOWA

AT THE DOOR

Here at the door are beacon fires to build,
  Dreams to be dreamt, and voices—voices stilled
As Eden darkly was ere the first bird
  In the ancestral silences was heard.

And here are songs, midway in homing flight,
  That hover on frail pinions and alight
Softly, less audibly than is the quake
  Of spirits tremulous, or hearts that break,
    Here at the door.

Here at the door are many messages
  Of cheer and lurking faith—a folded kiss,
A sealed desire, a sigh, a memory
  Of things that were as rainfall on the sea.

Thronging are shapes and shadows near at hand
  Cast by the moon upon an April land.
And in the air are rumors and the stir
  Of meetings and long partings to occur,
    Here at the door.

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

FOR
EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

Cast by the White Sun in
your rhyme,
Falls a Black Shadow. What's
the time?

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

I think there never was a dwelling place
So strangely like a human face
Reflected in a stream,
Or dim day-dream.

Small wonder that the chores are never done
On drowsy mornings when the sun
Is sleeping on the hill,
So warm and still.

Heavy with slumber, crimson poppies nod,
And phantom tenants slowly plod
On their monotonous way
From day to day,

Reluctantly remaining to explore
The corridors from door to door,
As though a wonderland
Were near at hand.

Daily the changing faces idle through
The galleries, in ghostly view
Of tapestries on high,
That drape the sky.

Temples and towers and snowy summits glow
Above the rivers far below,
As placid as a psalm,
In woven calm.

Then darkness falls and deepens on the world,
And under driving thunders whirled,
The cowed and gnashing main
Subsides again.

Such views are woven in the tapestries
As plainly as the changing skies,
Or goblins that amaze
The childish gaze.

And some divine, beyond the seeming thrall,
A vision glorifying all
The miracles the wise
Appear to prize.

Rejoicing, sorrowing or full of hope,
So many studiously grope
In search of hidden lore,
Forevermore.

They brood and sigh and have despairing ways
On gravely reckoning the days
Are growing few and brief,
Beyond belief.

Vast calls and silences in everything.
O vernal voices fain to sing
Of joys remote and strange,
Beyond the range

Of human utterance! They say there are
Dear forms and faces waiting far
In latitudes above
The will of love.

Nor wholly fabulous the thing appears,
When it is but these forty years
Since millions of them came
With face and name.

They idle by my windows in the sun,
As cronies evermore have done
On mornings soft and warm,
And teem and swarm.

Every arrival reticently bears
The same mortality, and wears
A cowl, as though afraid
The masquerade

Were ineffectual or otherwise
Bewildering successive eyes
With revelations more
Revered of yore.

Day after day upon my sunny view
Apparently so very few
Are eager to intrude
On solitude.

Anon with cares and labors put aside,
They laze and loiter and abide,
As though the time they spend
Would never end.

They sometimes bow with reverence and seem
As vague as shadows in a dream;
And never are the same
As when they came.

Age follows age while men and women strive
Against the multitude and thrive,
Or wander from the quest,
As may be best.

They have tribunals and such laws that one
May go his way with duty done,
Or with remorseful end,
Nor comprehend.

So often a unanimous appeal
Appears in faces that reveal
A mystery as deep
As death or sleep.

Abundant riches now and then are found
Occultly hidden underground:
And life and love are sold
For gear and gold:

And time is spent in search of something all
My fellows realize and call
By such and such a name
As Hope and Fame.

They fall and rise and fall and rise again
In triumph and command; and then,
Without a word to say,
They go their way.

Amazing and bewildering and strange
Beyond all reason is the change
With which a dream in view
Is coming true.

They say the house is haunted by a ghost.
Or is it but some wizard Host
Who watches at the door,
As though the score

Had ever been ignored by any chance?
Nothing escapes the searching glance
With which He levies toll
On every soul.

Divine reports and messages obscure,
Bearing a secret signature,
Are written in the grass
For those who pass.

And rare desires and memories and fears,
And dreams as radiant as tears,
Are woven in the frieze
And tapestries.

At times the shuttles thunder, and the loom
Spins darkness and appalling gloom
That ravel out again
In mist and rain.

Something discloses the identical
Dim dream made manifest in all
The faces with the wise,
Sad human eyes.

O burning eyes! O ghostly passions! Charred
Desires that smoulder ashenward!
O haunting phoenix of
Enduring love!

Albeit shapes in legion range the place,
On their departure not a trace
Does wall or door disclose
Of where one goes.

Death in the distance, like a hunted thing,
Stifles a cry more harrowing
Than bells that harshly toll
Rest to a soul.

It is as daft and dismal as the moan
Or as the sobbing of some lone
Unfathomable sea,
Alluring me

Away from flower and fellow — day and night
Urging and mastering despite
The most unyielding lust
Born of the dust.

Yet is it death? Can such an empty sound
As that come from the air or ground?
Or such a vacant cry
Fall from the sky?

Can death be other than a phantom fear?
And that cry on the inner ear
Be but a ghostly word
Unsaid, unheard?

Still is time pleading with eternity,
Bidding hope stay though all else flee;
Saying that naught is vain
If love remain.

So when the summons comes for one to stray
Beyond this residence of clay,
Since mortals must explore
From door to door,

On some soft evening may a gradual voice
Bid waif and wanderer rejoice
In the green fire . . and call
For each and all.

By the dim ways of dream the wandering breeze
Shall come with tidings from the seas,
And secrets from the rose
That may disclose

The vast infinitude wherein must be
Once more a hazy memory
Of glimmering chambers trod
Alone with God.

LYRICS AND ELEGIES

FOR
DAVID MORTON

Ships in Harbor you have
hailed,
That around the Horn have
sailed.

WAYFARERS

Rarely are roving eyes to see
A caravansary
Or home
Of starry dome

So filled as this with open doors
And windows — and with floors
So green,
Wind-swept and clean.

As though life were a holiday,
Sojourners on the way
Carouse,
While God keeps house.

With wooing, wizardry and song,
They cheer themselves along,
Until,
By starry will,

Wayfaring in the phantom mime,
The nomads slowly climb
The stair,
And slumber — where?

Daily arriving it has been
For them to enter in,
And then
Depart again.

Genial and garrulous are some,
Or wondering and dumb,
With wise,
Inquiring eyes.

Searching are others who would find
Hopes that were left behind,
And died
By the wayside.

Amazing voices sigh and call,
As if divining all
Must be
A mystery.

O winds in secret that confer
And bid the aspen stir,
Whence goes
Or comes the rose?

Its fragrance with what pain and care
Is woven of the air?
Its hue
Of dawn and dew?

Of such things vernal voices say
Wayfaring mortals may
Return
To sleep and learn.

Oblivion is in the chill
Monotony: and still
Does tide
Nor time abide.

So healing are the silences!
Tranquillity and peace
So sure!
Endure, endure!

As buds, afar, ere reaching spring,
Pine for the air and cling
A-thrill
From hill to hill,

So many wanderers and boon
Companions very soon
Attend
The gradual end.

Dusty with dream since time began,
The ghostly caravan
Moves on
From dawn to dawn.

Free but in liberty to stray,
As though no trodden way
Or trail
Could well avail,

Nearing a silver beacon light,
In guerdon of a night
Abroad,
Far on the road,

Crossing the frontier very quietly
May a spent fugitive have leave to flee
The tyrannizing sea
And shore —
At Home once more.

ORIGINS

Beginning with Lilith and Eve, there have been two classes of women — those who have taken the strength out of men, and those who have put it back. — Proverb.

Into a dark world of strange talk
Came a soft voice,
As that of a bird
Lulling forest and fen.
And then,
Stirred
By a word
That bade him rejoice
And rise and walk,
Adam awoke,
Spoke,
Listened awhile
For an answering call,
As a great silence fell over all.
Brooding and serious,
Something mysterious
On him was casting the shadow of pain
When, with a vain
Curious smile,
(A sigh of the eye),
As a siren went by,
The first of men shuddered,
Turned over and over
In thistle and clover,
And slept again:
And dreamt of Lilith!

Darker and stranger grew the world,
Fig leaves were shed,
And serpents curled.
And overnight
Was born delight;
And overday
Was born desire,
To curb dismay
Lest Adam tire.
The skies were red;
And all the glory
Of time in story
Suddenly flashed,
And thunder crashed;
And under the vine and fig-tree there,
Gowned and crowned with her radiant hair,
And frail as fire and free as the air,
And fair as her daughters have sought to be fair,
A woman stood
In virginhood.
Over the grass
It came to pass
That her eyes spoke . . .
So sweet was she
To hear and see,
So virginwise,
That from his eyes
And body then
The scales had all but fallen when
Adam awoke.
Eden and Eve!

HOW SHALL THE ANT SPEND THE NIGHT

How shall the ant spend the night,
The last night of all?
Or the bee, or the bird,
Whose song was a prayer hardly heeded or heard?
Or the serpents that crawl,
Panic-stricken of light?
Or the soaring untameable things
That have wings?
Shall they fall,
Or abide?
Shall they hide
In the skull . . in the husk
Of the bat-haunted void . . in the dusk
That is falling like fine
Sifted ashes on that which has strangely been yours or been mine?
Shall the tomb
Be a quickening womb?
Or worms be the anchoret ivies that twine
In the hair of a friend,
Loved and lost,
At what cost,
In the end?

Answer and say,
As one may,
That the riddle is slight.
But in sight
Of the ultimate day,
On the eve of the night,

Shall the jungles be gay?
Shall they thrill at the stem?
Shall the roar in them be one of fright,
And the trumpeting thunders in them
Be a plea for the light
Fading out of the sky?
Lo the stars that were once traveled by,
Shall they yet flicker high,
Blown by winds, each of them but the sigh
And regret of a god?
Or shall heavily nod
Every head,
Weighted down by the ominous dread?

Having loved, having died
Glorified,
Shall man, on the anvil, have quailed
At the frost in the fire?
Nay?
Sigh then nor say,
Nor complain
Of the punctual warning of pain
Foretelling decay.
Nor deny
To the valorous spirit of clay
Such courage as they,
Of the luminous kind,
Have and hold
In such measure today
As thrilled and made martyrs of old.

Aglow
On the radiant rolls of the humbly renowned

Are records that kindle and show
The shadowy glimmering way
Of the quick and the dead,
Of whom none to the dark shall be wholly resigned,
Though the last spark of hope
To be found,
Should be ashen — and nothing have scope,
Or escape from the doom of desire
For the light that had failed,
In a world gone to bed.

COMMUNION

Fire
And frenzy not kindled by wine,
Nor a fervently fine
Inappeasable hunger for bread,
On the eucharist spread,
Have austerely been mine
To acquire
Or divine.
And whether to have less or more
Of spirit and passion to spend,
Or hazard and toss
For a sovereign gain or a loss;
Yea,
Whether to pay
And be saved,
Or decline,
On the plea of the cost,
And be lost;

Who shall say
With what heaven and hell may be paved,
Or which may be which,
In the end?

So it seems,
O comrade! O friend!
That a soul, being rich
In so little that Dives esteems,
May but share with you this cup of dreams.

Joy
May be never again
As ecstatic and human and keen
As the stealthy recurrence of pain.
Nor the same ghosts be seen
By the man as were plain
To the boy.
Nor, alas!
As the swift seasons pass,
And Summer goes by
With thunder and sigh,
May the bugles of Autumn be blown
And rally the world as of yore;
Or Winter atone
For the leaves that no more,
In a trance,
Thrill with wonder and sing
And with witchery dance
To the mad marching music of Spring.
Bliss
And beauty endure,
And may peace be as sure,

And the slope
May it slowly descend!

So it is,
As it has been for long,
O comrade! O friend!
That a soul, being poor
As Lazarus, saving in hope,
May but break with you this bread of song.

ELSEWHERE

Beauty today lost a friend,
Who is said to have died,
Fading out of the world
As a petal is curled;
Or gone, it were better to say,
Elsewhere.
But softly!
Attend:

Something luminous, something she shed,
Goes on burning elsewhere;
And the luminous way that she led
Goes on leading elsewhere.
Lo,
The dolor of dread
And the canker of care
She has taken elsewhere.
Can such valiance be dead?
Surely
No!

Kindled purely,
Such fuel of spirit as made her so fair
Over here,
Must lighten the air
Over there,
In a region so near,
Yet so far,
That no grass may be seen
To be green,
No rose to have color — no star
Any radiance save as a tear
In the all-seeing Eye of all eyes,
Under starrier skies.

Fading faintly she fled,
As haply a tree
May flee;
Or a leaf
Blown free,
Lightly shedding the fetters of grief
At the will of the wind.
And the slow,
Autumn-thinned
Life in leaves being so,
May the coming and going of death
Be more than a rumor — than taking a breath?
Than a sin
Unsinned?
Or a tear
Unshed?
Or a thin
Phantom fear?

Or the dread
Of the last speech of all that remains to be said?

A friend of the world,
Who has died
As a pennon is furled,
Has gone, it were better to say,
In a clarion word,
To be cried
And be cheerily heard,
Elsewhere.

ADELINA PATTI

Her passing is as the
passing of a voice from
the April world. — Daily Press.

Ah,
Has this woman
Been nothing more to us
Than a brief bird-song
Heard in the forest?
Has she been nothing
Other than fancy
Fire or the glimpses
Of things that vanish
Wholly
And perish?
Dimmed as a memory
Now,
Has she never

Been any nearer
April and glory,
Lord,
Than a vesper
Thrush in the forest?

Surely
The poppy
Songs that she lavished,
Petal by petal,
On us like largess,
Had the dream in them
Such as despairing
Angels and mortals
Find in the aching
Solace of beauty!

Lord,
Of the lightning
And of the crashing
Thunders that bellow,
Rending the darkness,
Has she not taken
Fugitive, trailing
Echoes and made them
Shadows of luminous
Love and of longing?

Surely
Such rapturous,
Ravishing witchery
As she so perfectly
Veiled

Was the vision
Of something virginal,
Woven of wonder
At the first daybreak
And the first timid
Voice in the startled
Star-world of silence!

Birdwise
She tarried,
Then swiftly went from us,
Even as fugitive
Shapes and their shadows
Fade in the darkness;
Even as luminous
Tear trails of tempests
End in the rainbow;
Aye,
As all beauty
Has goals of glory,
And as all glory
Sounding but passes
Into the infinite
Night and the silence.

SPRING BLEW OPEN THE DOOR

Spring blew open the door;
An aspen stirred
And turned about,
As if in doubt
Of the time of day,

Or so they say;
And all of a sudden was something heard
That rose from a sigh to a ghostly shout,
As now and again
In a panic the rain
Went scurrying over the forest floor.
A bud came out —
And then a bird.

Spring blew open the door;
On a nearby hill
A robin found
A place in the sun,
And all in fun
Made a rollicking sound
That was less than a call
And more than a trill,
Sinking low and lower,
And then was still.
On all, on all
Was the dawning grace
Of a radiant face
And a presence rare
As the shadowy things
That out of the air
A dryad weaves.
A rustle of leaves,
A flutter of wings,
A heavenly stir
In the lilac tree —
And a rogue of a bee
Caught sight of Her.

UP THE HUDSON

I was sailing up the Hudson,
And beside me went along
Joy whose eyes were full of wonder,
And whose throat was full of song.

And the hills were passing visions
As the singing hours went by;
And we came upon a mountain
That arose and kissed the sky.

Then a hill fell to a valley,
And a brook became a rill;
And the Catskills in the distance
Had a duty to fulfill.

Urchins diving in the twilight
At Pokeepsie swam around
As the great boat left its mooring,
Swinging out and northward bound —

Riverwise to reach a passage
Such as vagrants sail and find
Only in the quest of beauty,
And to other goals are blind.

By the moon we were transported
To a place I Know Not Where,
And we went ashore together
Stepping lightly on the air.

And we came to the conclusion
That as long as we could burn
At both ends a pixie candle,
We had better not return.

TRAMPING

My Host the parting guest bids speed,
Who, in wayfaring, does but need
Rest and a little ease of heart,
And then is ready to depart.

Rounding a bend in the highway may one
Loaf with his shadow and share the sun.

Spending a morning and hearing a bird
Voice what the gypsies of Babylon heard.

Up and away from the wants and the cares
In the aching and hollow thoroughfares,

Never are air and the dew and the grass
Weary of bidding one whistle and pass

Over the bridges, out through the broad
Gates of the Summer and down the road.

Singing above in the branches, a gay
Voice hurries over the silence to say

Leisure and time and the varying mood
Are waiting beyond in the solitude.

Solvent as oafs having only the need
To follow wherever the road may lead;

Riches abound and the meagerest crust
Is enough for a prince and a pauper who must

Fellow and fare with the daffodils
On the myriad trail of a thousand hills.

Over the miles with the coming of dawn,
Morning and evening journeying on,

Drunken with rapture and eager to gaze
Over the rolling and billowy maize.

Blithely foreseeing a pause at the spring,
Finding and taking fresh heart to sing,

Because of the bracing and vital and rude
Freedom and joy in the solitude.

Ever a song and a sorrow, and still
A hope that beckons from hill to hill —

Alluring and smiling and vanishing down
The shadowy miles so cool and brown.

Thrilled by a rivulet chanting a rune
Through the meadowy summer afternoon,

When the fumes are heavy and purple and sweet,
Over the way in the ripening wheat.

This is the meed and the need of a boy
On the trail of a vagrant and vanishing joy,

When the sun and the air, by a natural whim,
Are wishing and willing to welcome him.

Turning and wandering home with the gay
Little leaves at the close of a summer day,

When all is a sob and a sigh and a call,
Before the imperial coming of Fall.

Heavy at heart when the wind and the rain,
Sudden as regiments, sweep through the plain,

Wheeling and veering and breaking to run
Out of the shadow and into the sun.

Pausing and hearing the garrulous leaves
Gossiping under the heavenly eaves;

Way-worn with wonder and drowsily bent
On sharing the same commodious tent

Of darkness starrily pitched in sight
Of the wandering waters of delight.

SPORES

FOR
THE FLUSHING GARDEN CLUB

They who make Gardens grow are,
in their duty,
Sunwise and moonwise and starwise
to Beauty.

THE YEAR IS CHANGING ITS NAME

The year is changing its name
From April to May;
And today
An oriole came,
And was heard to declare
That the sun
And the air
And the showers
Were each in their pastoral way
Resolving to cling
To the reverent custom of placing the flowers,
One by one,
On the altar of Spring.

Everything
Is aflush and aglow.
Even though
The time and the season too tardily come
For the partridge to drum,
Or for such sleepy heads
As the poppies to turn
In their spare seedy beds,
The tulips are torches beginning to burn
And illumine the land,
Being blown to a flame
By many a breeze that is wafting a wand,

And casting a spell,
Coming breathless to tell
The fabulous story
Of some morning-glory,
And recount the green miracles such as the rain
In the grass,
Again,
Is bringing to pass.

Oh,
The tender green way
In which summer is born!
First for an hour,
Then for a day,
Flower follows flower,
After a bird.
Suddenly finding a forest forlorn,
Something in nature is secretly stirred,
And the shy things are all in a hurry to grow.

Row upon row
The hedges are robing in green.
Behold,
How plainly the lilacs are seen
To quiver and thrill,
In response to the touch
Of invisible fingers beginning to clutch
At the heart of the world.
And the valor of daisies is being narrated
Once more and awaited
As that of a weed,
In a moment of need,

Coming bravely with pennons unfurled . . .
And still,
As of old,
Are dandelions paving the meadows with gold.

Only are lovers to know,
In this ancient year,
Of the spirit of mirth
Again finding birth
In the glow
And the shout and the cheer,
Rising out of the earth?

A BRIEF FOR THE BIRD

God,
Being weary of chaos, and shaping the spheres,
Was beginning to nod;
And thinking of music to lighten the toil
Of making a world out of thunder and tears,
Created a bird,
And gave it so much as a spare barren branch
Whereon to be free
And blazon the glee
Of a wild feathered thing
That would sing
Of the lost heavens sought by the breeze,
And hidden in trees.

Presently shaken
By thunder, and stirred
By the wind of His word,
Leaf after leaf
Began to awaken,

Then to appear
And cast a cool shadow — a ladle
Of shade
For a tear
Freshly laid
In the song that the world in its cradle
First heard.

And the world, being rocked,
Fell asleep;
And saw in a dream
That beauty in sound
Was heaven refound;
And beauty in hue
Was a dream coming true;
And beauty in truth
Was a vision for angels and mortals to deem
As a Spirit of Treasure to covet and keep
In trust,
Beyond rust,
Beyond ruth,
In vaults strangely guarded and locked.

Vast
And veiled in the flickering present and vanishing past,
Is the wonder that hardly a word
Of esteem,
Deserved of all men and of all that they dream,
In silences broken,
Sung yet or yet spoken,
Has plainly been heard
By the bird.

REVERIE

To Cecilia

In a world that has no end,
Fancy free us, little friend.

Let us idle to and fro
In the Land of Thus-and-So.

Others on a rock may build
Castles for the sun to gild.

Ours are more or less than grand,
Being built on dreams and sand.

Others having scope and range,
Sing the ringing round of change.

Lost in wonder, it may thrill
Time to find us standing still.

What have we to do or say
To an old world turning gray!

Simple bodies, you and I
Wonder what supports the sky.

Wonder why no splashing sound
Follows when the earth turns round.

Wonder what is overheard
By the trout and bee and bird. —

Or what forces, tame or wild,
Draw the lion to the child. —

Wonder at most everything
Taking root or on the wing.

Of a truth and strange to tell,
Wonder is a waking spell

Cast on those who feel and find
Beauty much as do the blind;

Groping here and searching there,
Tracing beauty everywhere —

Beauty that would never hide,
Were it never crucified.

Fancy any evil worse
Than a ghoulish universe!

Or a more praiseworthy sight
Than the Milky Way at night!

Than the ages hour by hour
Shaping petals in a flower!

In a world that has no end,
Cherish beauty, little friend.

NOVITIATE

Hardly a hermit thrush had stirred,
Nor yet from any ghostly bole
In all the garden had been heard
A rumor of the oriole.

Telling the roses one by one,
Grey as a Beadsman were the skies.
In ashes sifting from the sun
Were the stray ruins of butterflies.

And with a rosy sisterhood
Of blossoms dreaming in the dawn,
Demurely nodded one that stood
Behind a dewy curtain drawn.

Daydreams she dreamt and never gazed
Beyond the curtain, it is told,
Until the Twilight came and raised
A wondering little face of gold.

Who knows? Was Beauty in disgrace
Thrilling the garden with a smile,
Shy as a flower-saint fain to face
The darkness for a little while? —

Fleeing perhaps a nunnery
Of roses very softly furled,
Confessing a desire to see
The wonders of the garden world? —

And strangely though the seasons pass,
To know the clemency of pain,
The tribulation of the grass,
The tender mercy of the rain?

PROTEST AND ABANDON

FOR
O. HENRY

Who has gone on his infinite way,
Turning Night into Day.

GANGS

A hobo medley to the accompaniment of an abandoned banjo upon a spirit highway. A. D. 1919.

My gang has a soul
As good as gold;
And though bankrupt on the whole,
Is bought nor sold.
My gang dares to dream,
Love and dream as well as scheme,
And to frown upon a crown;
Dares to scoff at rule and line,
Deeming derelicts divine,
Or to bid the world go hang.
Twang, twang!
I'd be *lost* in your gang;
Come and join mine.

My gang now and then
Has gone astray;
Yet is filled with wonder when
Pharisees pray.
My gang is an oaf,
Such an oaf as dares to loaf,
And acquit a hypocrite,
Or to freeze and drink the lees

Of the warming tavern wine,
That has such a human tang.
Twang, twang!
I'd be *dry* in your gang;
Come and join mine.

My gang never took
Fright at disgrace;
Nor has been afraid to look
Life in the face.
My gang dares to sin,
And to grin through thick and thin,
Or to kiss and call it bliss;
Dares to live a fugitive
In the forests that entwine
Bird and bee and flower and fang.
Twang, twang!
I'd be *found* in your gang;
Come and join mine.

ON USING THE SUN AND MOON

Using the sun,
City, O city
Chary of pity,
What have you done?
What visions fashioned,
What day-dreams spun?
What have you gloried in,
Worshiped, devised,
Sought and, in seeking, found

Most to be prized
As a delight,
Since only yesternight,
Using the sun?

Staring with tearless eyes,
Dimmed by no ghostly dread
Lest what Belshazzar read
Darken the sun,
Think of its being
Warmer than charity,
And of no cost!
Daily from Ophirs of luminous ore
Giving until it can give nothing more
Unto a city
Bent on despoiling
So much, and soiling
Beauty — and toiling
Unto what tranquil or thunderous end?
Say to what end!

Using the moon,
O dark queen city,
Over whose head is thrown
Veiled silver loveliness;
Under whose feet are spread
Thistles and thorns to tread;
What of the burgeoning
Lilies of love?
What of the few
Dreams that come true?
Why,

Over you,
Are no birds in the sky?
Why are the trees all too willing to die?
Why rage and revel so plainly,
Though vainly,
To stifle a sigh,
O dark queen city
Using the moon?

With all your million eyes
Gaze at the moon!
Think of its being
Colder than charity,
Vestal and veiled!
Is it because
Churches and laws,
Judges and teachers,
Some of them kindly,
Still groping blindly,
Tarnish the vision
Of Love and blur
All that in all your imperious dreaming
Is dreamt of Her?
What of the loneliness,
What of the pride,
God! of the many times
Love must have died,
Shrinking from pity,
In this one city
Using the moon?

Glory aglee, a symphony
  Is finely being sounded
By flutes and horns and violins,
  And drums divinely pounded.

This is a hall wherein we all
  Are music-loving people.
And next door is an austere church
  Topped by an austere steeple.

Next door a few have each a pew,
  For which they must be paying;
And I am one and you are two
  Who wish them well in praying: —

Who wish them well the while they tell
  Each other what a pity
That you and I are sinners in
  A very wicked city.

Our orchestra plays do, sol, la,
  As though the heart of beauty
Had not been broken long ago
  By devotees of duty.

It plays and plays and, as the days
  Go on, it is a wonder
That church mice, stealing all about,
  Steal nothing of our thunder.

Is it because our music laws
  Have made us too quick-witted

To think to go where only great
Composers are admitted?

First violin has ever been
For most of us a riddle;
And since we all may not play first,
Heigh-ho for second fiddle.

A VENDOR OF VISIONS

There is a tall fine fellow
Who makes the days go through,
Who hardly casts a shadow,
Bearing a ghostly brew.

They call him a bootlegger,
A Jew whom the Gentiles prod
For selling dreams and visions,
Courage to drowse and nod; —

Courage to search for beauty,
So strangely out of place
In haunts of waifs and wastrels
Spent and forlorn of grace.

Daydreaming to discover
How beauty is distilled,
They lose themselves in wonder
That so few cups are filled.

Yet brimming vats of vision
Has this tall fellow brought,

Seas of fine fancies breaking
On sandy shores of thought.

He is a sort of victor
To be conquered in the end.
Drink! that it may not find him
Dry — and a cheated friend.

MILLENIUM

It may have come and may have gone,
Be ages overdue,
Or yet be just about to dawn,
Like something new

In a world waiting for the day
When a man shall cease to shirk,
And sighing on his way to play,
Singing go to work.

STUFF OF DREAMS

Coins of silver did I take
To the vintner — and was sold
Stuff of dreams wherewith to make
Some odd poems: which I hold
Was a bargain.

Soon it brought me very near,
Mothwise, to a silver star
By which vagrant spirits steer;

And it lured me very far
On my voyage.

Gave me silver seas to sing,
Hopes to build a raft of song,
To which derelicts may cling
In my wake, as to a long
Silver shadow.

APOCALYPSE

Prison! There is a challenge,
A bugle, a gun in the word.
Caged! Oh, what hells of fury
Stifle a bird!

Escape! At a signal the senses
Stir and start to explore.
Free! Oh, what heavens of wonder,
Shore beyond shore!

BALLADE IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

Man consists in Truth. If he reveals Truth, he reveals himself. If he betrays Truth, he betrays himself. — Novalis.

Searching through life for something gay,
Something that might be shorn of pain,
They, in this world of work-a-day,
Strange chaff winnow from stranger grain —

They who on broken hopes have lain
And slept and dreamt and, spent with ruth,
Have wakened, searching life again.
Who has glasses to see the Truth?

Shake out great music as one may
In symphonies of silver rain;
Yet may a song, a simple lay,
Be greatly sung; and wherefore strain
To scale the mighty mountain chain
Of epic peaks that have, in sooth,
Risen in grandeur and remain?
Who has glasses to see the Truth?

Heavy may be the price to pay,
Nor much of peace may one attain,
To ease and lighten the long way,
Who still of nothing would complain.
Age is a wan moon on the wane,
Seen through the eyes of passing youth.
Even though life may be a stain,
Who has glasses to see the Truth?

Envoy.

Prince, many warriors have been slain;
Beauty has felt the scarring tooth
Of envy; and Pan pipes in vain.
Who has glasses to see the Truth?

ADRIFT

I have known perils such as haunt the sea,
And perils of a land that has no name;
And foolish-wise have set a sail for fame,
And all but drowned in sight of shores that flee.

Thunders that shake the stars have shaken me;
And the great rollers that on Jason came
Have broken my heart, with such acclaim
As hell accords to spirits sailing free.

I have gone down, come up — and now but drift,
Awaiting something that may never come.
Perhaps sometime the fickle wind will shift,
And the storm die and leave me nearer home,
Rafting the great seas as they roar along:
God look for me afloat upon a song.

A POET SHUTS THE BOOK OF DREAMS

Great dreams of one great love
Have all but made me
Swear that the gods above
Slept — and betrayed me.

Dreams were once as the moon
Sailing full-masted.
Coming too late or soon,
None of them lasted.

Dreams that have been a curse
  Have made me labor
Never to be much worse
  Than a bad neighbor.

Dreams that have slaughtered men
  Stifle my laughter.
Who but has faltered when
  Dark dreams came after?

I would be through with dreams;
  I would be saying,
Sadly, that nothing seems
  To come of praying.

SEAS AND HORIZONS

FOR
THE FOLKS AT SWAN ISLAND

The Skippers on the coast of Maine
Are Something Else and Yet Again.

ALOHA

I know a little island
  Set in the summer sea,
Wave-washed and green and mossy
  As green can be.

Great joys are in the offing;
  And always day and night,
Putting into the harbor,
  Is some delight.

Around it sail great sorrows;
  So far it is from care
That only fleets of laughter
  May anchor there.

And only strong fair faces
  Pass always to and fro;
As in a place enchanted
  They come and go.

Once came a green sea-serpent,
  The island people say,
And in their warmth of welcome
  Basked for a day.

Basked — and with venom sweetened
  Fled from that holy ground,

Dyeing the seas with envy
For miles around;

With envy of the people
Who worship lovely things,
Such as in eld were worshiped
By queens and kings.

Stay, lovely little island,
Still in the summer sea,
Wave-washed and green and mossy
As green can be!

A SHIP COMES IN

Sailing so silently
Sea after silver sea,
Land ho! land ho!
Lookouts report a sign,
Sky-blue and azure fine,
On the horizon line;
Thunder below.

Great winds are gaining way,
Filled with blown spume and spray.
Sing joy! sing joy!
Guns in the tempest roar;
Ships that rich cargoes bore
Litter the ocean floor.
Harbor ahoy!

LOON LAKE

Wild geese that at Loon Lake
I once saw flying,
Why do you never cease
Crying and crying?

Why still patrol the skies,
Shot but not dying,
Wild geese that never cease
Crying and crying?

Lilied with memories,
Tear-fed and sighing,
Is Loon Lake. Oh wild geese
Crying and crying!

QUESTIONNAIRE

I went into the woods to make a song,
Wherewith to buy
My love a gown.

So sang a poet and lord of rhyme,
Making the chimes of spring
In autumn chime.

I fled the woods and brought flower words along,
Made of a sigh,
Freshly to town.

Fresh and wood-wild, they harbored something strange
In every note,
Something flower-shy.

Singing of beauty, careless of renown,
Veiled in a cloud, to fling
Silver rain down.

Hushed is the song. Was it lacking in range?
Such a remote
Call of the sky?

Or was it a lack — a lack of the town?
Something was wrong,
With the town, or the song?

TRAIN LOST

"Too late,"
The Train Master said,
"Gates closed for the Six-thirteen."
So I wait for the Six-thirty-six.
And my heart that was ticking too slow
For the Six-thirteen,
Ticks on for the Six-thirty-six;
Ticks on,
Ticks on,
Behind time . . . perhaps . . . slowing down.
Tick, tick.

Hush!

Friend,
Into the night
Ahead,
Who knows
When the Last Train goes?

BEFORE THE PIXIES CAME TO AMERICA

FOR
RUPERT HUGHES

Wisely this Play of Just Pretend
Is Dedicated to a Friend.

BEFORE THE PIXIES CAME TO AMERICA

A Masque in Allegory

Oberon.	Titania.
Robin Goodfellow.	Moonlight.
Sirenus.	Raindrop.
Fancy.	Sunbeam.
Jack Frost.	Zephyr.

Pixies, Fairies, Gnomes, Goblins, Elves.

Scene: The Forest of Arden.
Time: Midnight.

The king and queen of the Little People are discovered before an open space, on canopied thrones of leaves and flowers. A wandering rivulet emerges, eddying in the moonlight between the trees, as over running laughter. ROBIN GOODFELLOW approaches as

PROLOGUE.

Now raise conjectural fancies of a time
When Nature, worn with dark and feverous hours,
Resumes her quiet restfulness. All air
Is hushed, save that the sudden chanticleer
Shrilly assails, across the meadow miles,
Some neighboring countryside. The hemlocks muse,
The drowsy alders sway; and trooping forth
With Oberon and with Titania,

O'erskipping hills and intervening knolls,
Approaching quietly these fays and gnomes,
Goblins and pixies congregate as shapes
And shadows of an idle fantasy.
Antique, capricious, humorous and droll
Embodied meanings, not unnatural
About the forest, gather into view.
And sowing visions in the fields of sleep,
Under the moon, as now the spirits pass,
Oblivion attends a weary world.

Shapes in motley procession
appear during the prologue
and, after passing in review,
disperse variously beneath the trees.

OBERON.

Aha! my leal, incony travelers,
Come hither.

ALL.

Alderliefest Oberon.

OBERON.

As darkness deepens, and the azure veil
Slips from the shoulders of the universe,
Once more put up your filmy parasols
Against the dew and starlight and the moon,
O you that people dreams of happiness!
And rendering your tardy reckonings,
Softly from India and the Lebanons

And the tired lands where elfin angels soothe
Misfortunes sighing over loneliness,
Come stealing, trooping, rustling like the leaves,
And be most welcome on the bosky slopes
Of Arden.

TITANIA.

Cool Arden, where all the elves
Of Elfland summered in the days of yore,
Ere the sweet Swan of Avon was last seen
Sailing the seas of wonder!

SIRENUS.

Ever since
Has Summer wandered sadly down the world,
As mourning over beautiful romance
That is no more. The nights are empty now
Of the shy foxfoot hours; and hunters on
The elfin hills of fancy far between.

FANCY.

Ah me, ah me! Since then!

OBERON.

Since then, truly,
The hurrah of the world bewilders those
Who shuffle off the burr of gravity
In periodical ineptitude . . . .
So be it that our jesters may tonight
Take heart and hands, and may each gypsy sprite,
Relating quaint adventures, toss a purse
Of goblin money to the universe

Off yonder slumbering. The death of mirth
Gave the dark rumor birth of grief on earth.

All take hands, tripping mazy measures in the moonlight and, in the key of lisping leaves, chanting the lullaby:

High and low, rocking slow,
In their cradles airily,
Rook and wren slumber when
Over Arden warily
We do wander down the night,
To the left and to the right
Wheeling O as we go
Tripping onward faerily,
While Time fiddles merrily.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Canes and crutches! Pff! A reeling measure
For one so heavy. Tavern ingles? So.

OBERON.

A finger-length of immortality.
Come hither, Fancy. Now while yonder owl
Grows hoarse declaiming in the wilderness,
Attend on us and tax your memory,
Or tame the whistling coursers of the air,
For swift conveyances to your provinces.
Whither away, aerial wanderer?

FANCY.

Mounting always on some sky
Voyage of discovery,
As a falcon soars, to rule
Quarries of the beautiful;
Now on earth, then far away,
Through the flaming gates of day,
Into Paradise I dare
Venture sailing ever bare,
Wind-walled turrets of the air,
Everywhere, everywhere.

TITANIA.

Prithee, remember Lucifer.

OBERON.

And know
Your utmost power — for they fall indeed
Who dwell among the stars. Aha, Sunbeam.

SUNBEAM.

On some oriental course,
Drifting down the universe
As a priest in summer bowers,
Gaily marrying the flowers;
Or awakening with mirth
Blossoms dreaming in the earth;
Ere dissolving to explore,
Warmly, every apple-core,
Marshaling the clouds I soar,
Evermore, evermore.

OBERON.

A most warm-hearted fellow, it would seem;
An arrant bee, a bumble bee.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

A cross
Between red-haired Apollo and the imp
That cheered and tickled Jove when Bacchus made
Oblivion out of wine. Diana jumped
Across the zodiac and fled before
The reeling stars down Watling Street.

TITANIA.

No more,
Robin, no more. Wee minion of the moon,
Come this way. Whither have you all night long
Wandered amid the starry wilderness?

MOONLIGHT.

Melancholy, sweet and lone
As a vision I have strown
Silvery lilies on the grass,
And seen wooing lad and lass
Quickening the stars above
Earth and sea with kisses of
Passion and the Queen of Love.

OBERON.

Examine into this most carefully,
Robin. Omit no detail, for the times
Are dislocated certainly.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Ho, ho!
No Mantuan swain need bawl for clemency
Tomorrow.

OBERON.

Well said.

TITANIA.

Robin, you are fain
To be a joy forever, if not quite
A thing of beauty.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Honestly in doubt
And skeptical myself upon that point,
Oh liege and very lovely sovereign!
I make a virtue of necessity,
By using eloquence to blur my paunch,
As homely mortals commonly affect
Intelligence and mental gracefulness.
In man or woman, to my biased mind,
Much virtue is stupidity.

OBERON.

Quite true;
And spoken frankly.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

I have more to say,
If it but pleases royalty to hear.

OBERON.

Proceed.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

After much study of the world,
And much applause for what is best therein,
I find it lacking. Even to an elf
With a blind eye, it is quite obvious
That changes, constant progress, must be made
By moles and men ambitious to survive;
Else they become obstructions.

OBERON.

Whither tends
Such talk?

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

I prophesy democracy,
And raise in proof thereof a spangled flag
Woven of vision and the ancient dream
Of work-worn and of woaded folk alike.
What though it be the nightmare of a king!
The hour is striking that will be the knell
Of misinformed, imperious government
On earth, in Fairyland, or in the stars.

OBERON.

What? Have a care! Sedition in an oaf
Of lesser stature rashly had provoked
A lengthy term of penal servitude,
Or banishment.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

And what means banishment,
By despot or vainglorious emperor,
Except to strip oneself of servitude,
And sail for the new world!

OBERON.

Go hence and learn
Of graft accepted of hypocrisy,
And spewed in gutters, as it is by men
Who to the public trough repair and gorge
Ad nauseam. Democracy is yet
In embryo — a bold experiment,
Subject to time. America too long
Has been a vampire drawing from the world
Its spirit and best blood. It must be leeched.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Or visited.

OBERON.

Cease! Hither, reveler.

RAINDROP.

Every evening as each
Of the children seems to reach
Sleepytown almost, the fleet
Rainy patterings of feet,
In the summertime, aloof
Over attics, furnish proof
Of the fairies on the roof.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Aha, ha! Rogues and rascals multiply
As famously as mortals quarreling
With Fortune.

TITANIA.

All of which shamefully deceives
The Melancholy Bishop on the verge
Of hospitality when summer showers
Delay unwary travelers.

OBERON.

Sessa!
Cogs-wounds, enough! Assoil this icicle,
Before his shadow freezes on the ground.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Good-lack!

OBERON.

Out, out! Elbow the atmosphere,
Robin, or study your nativity
With extreme heedfulness. An patience proves
A weary mare, your dignity may limp
As painfully as modern pensioners
Applying for a competence. In times
Of peace are scars not coinable? Alas
That honest men should of necessity
So often be constrained to cool their heels
In ante-rooms of upstarts.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Honesty,
Of wide acquaintance, meets with villainous,
Low, fat and greasy citizens among
Corporeal multitudes.

TITANIA.

Indeed?

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Indeed.
Like gifted mortals I, I too, have sweat
And striven anxiously to make a mark,
And for my pains have thought myself a fool;
Hence my perspiring knowledge.

OBERON.

Ha, ha! Views
That smack of observation and of some
Experience and labor; but a most
Threadbare philosophy. Hush, hush! A still,
Small, rimy voice craves audience.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Attend
Upon this relic of antiquity,
Displaying most reluctant eagerness,
As though the rascal had already lied.

JACK FROST.

Appearing to mortal view
A translated drop of dew,
Soldering rebellious years
Firmly as with frozen tears;
Many evenings on the ricks,
While the scheming stars plan tricks
Overhead to trip the day,
Boreas and Jack Frost lay
Dreaming wintertime away.

OBERON.

As worthy children of Medusa or,
Perhaps, some petrified metonymy
Delivered shivering. Uncommon things
Have been discredited before.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

The most
Improbable seem most probable.

TITANIA.

More
Reverence, Goodfellow. Midnight ambles on
Impetuously.

SUNBEAM.

Aurora thaws the sun
In arms more warmly amorous, and lays
Her rosy fingers on the draperies
Above the orient.

OBERON.

Already now
Is yonder chanticleer in readiness
To call the sun.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

That braggart of the dawn,
Peace-breaker, feathered timepiece, vain and loud
Witness of misdirected energy,
Needs managing.

TITANIA.

Away and fairly,
Fairily follow Zephyr airily.

ZEPHYR.

Over hills and dales I go
Hither, thither, to and fro;
Even as a mystery
In some wilderness of glee;
Day and night distributing
Breezy songs the twittering
Choir folk of the forest sing.

TITANIA.

A gracious spirit, surely.

OBERON.

Ariel
Is at his tricks again, or very like
Some imp of darkness is abroad. Nature
Has ever been capricious as the air
Consoling Mother Maudlin.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

Fickleness
In virgins flaunts a virtue.

TITANIA.

Hold, sirrah!
This is no time to quibble, nor to weigh
The testimony of a bachelor.
For yonder in the disappearing mist
That lingers on the eastern balconies,
Becoming warm and human as a rose,
Venus is rising in the orient.
The slumbering universe awakes. Day, day
Is at the door.

OBERON.

Away!

TITANIA.

Away!

ALL.

Away!

As day breaks over the forest, the birds are heard singing, and, of a sudden, as in a broken spell, the spirits merge and vanish in the dawn.

What though in shining song,
Silver be tendered?
Golden though be the gong,
What sound is rendered?
Tolling for royalty,
Ring in control,
Order and loyalty
Bronzed and American,
Laughing, convivial,
(Austere nor trivial),
Singing the right
As well as the wrong,
In chorus with those who are vocal in kind
And, gifted with vision or avid and blind,
Are groping and searching in spirit to find
That the life of the one is the life of the whole.

True,
Fellowman,
You,
In the van,
May hear and see more of God and His plan
Than one to whom nothing in truth is less clear
To see and to hear.
Yet America wakens, with Summer in sight
And April in flower,
Year after year,
At the flowering hour,
And calls in the caves that are darker than doubt,
Darker with foemen within than without.

Slowly shaping a word
To be heeded and heard
And weighed by the world,
Its spirit is curled
And hooded to strike,
With a passion of might
And of mercy alike
For that which is right,
And against every crying injustice and wrong
That may sadden a song.

Whitman, as flower and flag,
Emerson, soul,
Poe, as the singing voice,
Cheer on ahead,
Bidding the oncoming legions rejoice.
Need such a people in union to brag?
All being said,
They of the vision have surely to stand,
Eyes on the goal,
Till the little that leavens has leavened the whole
Of this wonder land,
So young and so old.

Youth to be spent, and age to inherit
A splendor of spirit
That sooner or later
Behold!
Shall bring a creator,
An equal or greater
Than Shakespeare to hand.

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